

Grant aids playground installation
Monterey County Herald, The (CA)
March 24, 2007

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Estimated printed pages: 2

With the help of a \$50,000 grant, an army of volunteers is gearing up for a day of activities, which includes setting up a playground in East Salinas, to commemorate the life of labor leader Cesar Chavez.

On March 31, La Union del Pueblo Entero, an organizing arm of the United Farm Workers, will install a playground at the Firehouse Community Center as part of a statewide celebration in honor of its founder.

"It's going to be a community celebration," said Gabriela Herrera, LUPE's program manager. "The kids are already practicing their songs, and we're going to have a dance." Activities will begin with breakfast and assigning of duties. While volunteers older than 18 will be hard at work putting together swings and slides, children will be engaged in painting and decorating the building.

LUPE was awarded the grant from KaBoom!, a national nonprofit group dedicated to building playgrounds. Residents have been hard at work in the past few weeks cleaning up the area to make it ready.

The playground is being installed even as LUPE's future at its current home is uncertain. In February, city administrators proposed taking back the 50-year-old city-owned firehouse when LUPE's lease is up Oct. 1. The building was leased to LUPE in 2004 for \$1 a year, when the city was reeling from a financial crunch that forced \$15 million in budget cuts.

Before applying for the KaBoom! grant, LUPE administrators asked for, and were granted, permission to modify the premises.

LUPE's playground will be one of 10 built in California to celebrate Cesar Chavez Day. Today, California first lady Maria Shriver will participate in a similar effort at the Watts Labor Community Action Committee Center in Los Angeles.

"Playgrounds allow our children to stay active, inspire imaginations, connect communities and, more importantly, teach life lessons," Shriver said in a statement. Building the playgrounds is a way to continue the legacy of Cesar Chavez, she said. By the time the volunteers are done, the firehouse will have a different look, Herrera said. "The wall surrounding the playground is going to have lots of little murals — the children are going to paint a map of America and a hopscotch," she said. "From the street, it's going to look really different."

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